

U. S. Program Begun In 1938 May Provide Ships for Britain

500 Goal in 10 Years Stepped Up; Yards Are Working at Capacity

By the Associated Press.
A shipbuilding program begun in 1938 after Joseph Patrick Kennedy dynamited the facts out of the American merchant marine situation may enable America to respond to Great Britain's appeal for ships.

The 10-year, 500-ship program that was developed after Mr. Kennedy told Congress and the Nation what he thought of the state of the merchant marine sent a throb of new activity pulsing through the shipyards. It helped to ready them, partially, for the vastly expanded naval building program that was to follow.

And in the wake of this has come new demands for private commercial craft.

It all adds up to the greatest burst of shipbuilding activity the Nation has experienced since those frantic days of the World War when it set out to bridge the Atlantic with ships and after the war tucked the bridge away in harbors and isolated inlets to rot.

24 Shipyards Active.

The whole picture is not to be gathered either by a study of Maritime Commission figures or by scanning the effervescent accounts of contracts that bubble through the pages of marine trade magazines. But, combined, the two give a sort of idea of what America has in stock and on order.

The Maritime Commission lists 24 active shipyards that are building ocean-going vessels.

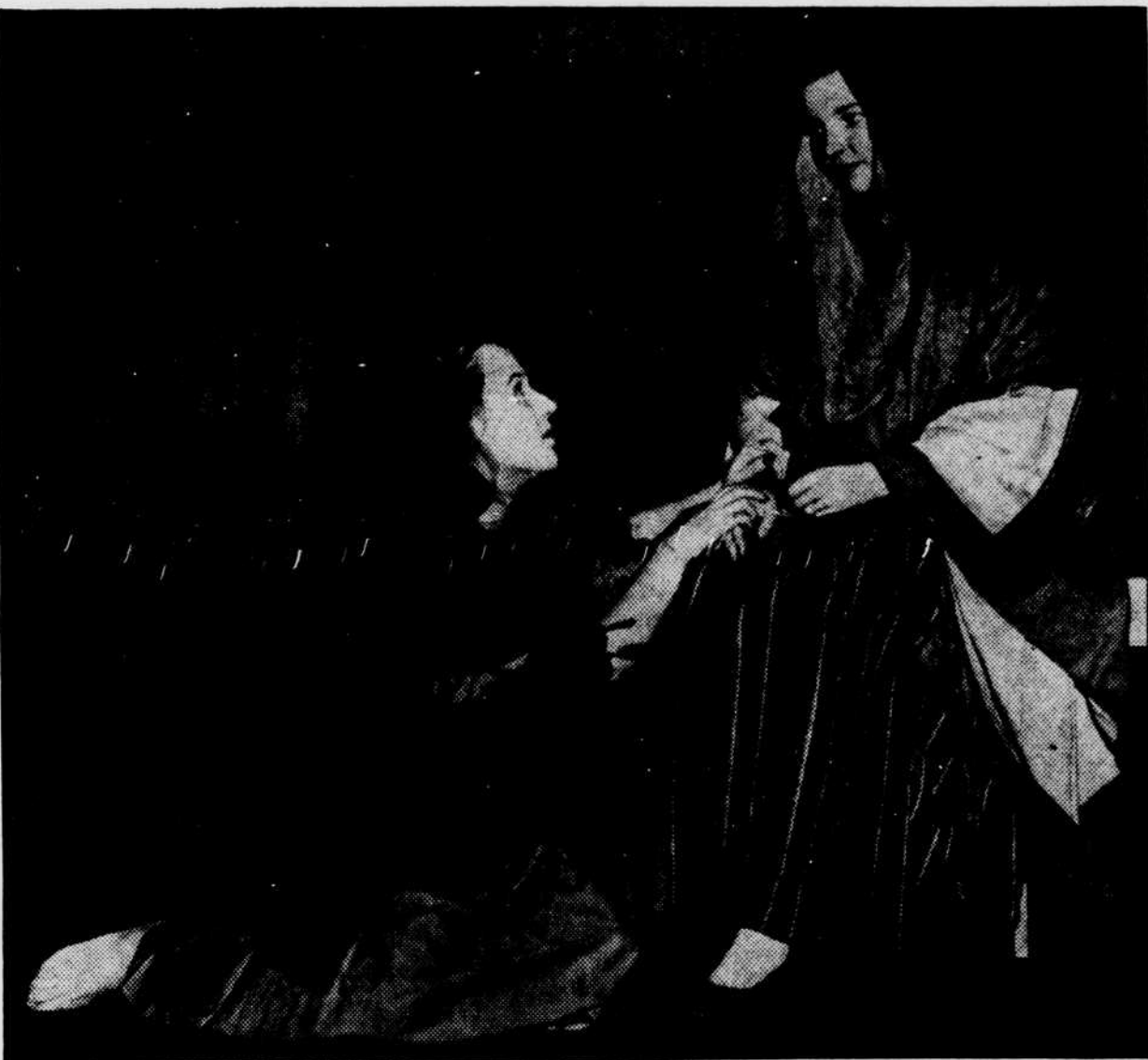
This is exclusive of Great Lakes shipyards and small yards building yachts, tugs, barges and small craft. Trade magazines list 109 such yards as getting contracts last month. Nor does the commission figure include the Government's navy yards, busy on fighting craft, as, for that matter, are quite a few of the private yards.

Trade magazines say there were 335 commercial ships with a total tonnage of 1,600,000 under construction October 1. Of these, 183 with a tonnage of 1,500,000 were seagoing craft.

But with the single historical exception of Hog Island, ships have never been turned out on an assembly line. They take time in the building.

Program Stepped Up.

The Maritime Commission expected to build at the rate of 50 ships a year for 10 years. It has stepped up that program contractually. In less than three years it has contracted for 179 ships. But in the same period it has got only 82 ships launched, and only 54 of these



RELIGIOUS DRAMA REHEARSED—Pictured at dress rehearsal of Minnie Frost Rands' "The Prince of Peace" are Phyllis Rands (left) as Mary and Ellen Loving as Elizabeth. Scenes from the play will be presented the night of December 19 in the Arts Club of Washington, 2017 I street N.W.

—Star Staff Photo.

are commissioned, out on the seas doing their jobs.

All of these ships are built to specifications that have been worked over by the Navy. They are easily convertible to naval uses, so easily, in fact that some of the private operators have complained that naval uses were better provided for in the plans than were the commercial purposes.

Take tankers, for instance. Several have been built for the Standard Oil Co., and some of these have already been taken over by the Navy. By specification, they were twin-screw, 12,000-ton, 150,000-barrel, 13,500-horsepower, 18-knotters. They were the fastest, biggest, most powerful commercial tankers afloat. They had more speed, size and power than a commercial ship needed. But they fitted nicely into the growing United States Navy.

A combination cargo and passenger type ship takes 15 months to build. This time is cut to 12 months for a plain cargo ship. It can be cut to six months if the lines of supply are wide open for the flow of materials, machinery and equipment. Or, in the fabulous days of Hog Island, when materials were pre-fabricated, the ships were

pushed off the assembly lines into the water at the rate of one every 23½ hours.

Vast Assembly Plant.

But Hog Island, first a swamp and now an airport, was converted into a shipyard but into a vast assembly plant. In a year 250 buildings, 18 miles of road and 80 miles of railroad track were built to pour materials into the 50 shipways that laced its 2 miles of water front near Philadelphia. Behind the lines, 88 steel plants turned out plates for Hog Island hulls and manufacturers ground out machinery and gear. The ships were smacked together as fast as the railroads could pour this pre-fabricated material into the yards. Many of the ships still afloat belong to that homely brood of 122 chicks hatched out at Hog Island in such a super-heated hurry.

Counting the Hog Islanders, the Shipping Board wound up the World War with 2,316 ships. It has been trying ever since to get rid of them, just now is beginning to scrape the bottom of the barrel. About 2,000 had been sold, scrapped, lost at sea or written off the rolls in one way or another by the time the board became the Maritime Commission. When the war broke out in Eu-

rope last year, the commission still had 107 cargo, 6 passenger and 5 refrigerator cargo ships left out of this aging batch. They had been gathering barnacles for almost 20 years in the harbors and inlets around Baltimore, New Orleans, the James and Patuxent Rivers and Bremerton, Wash. Fifty of these have been sold since the war started.

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nine since the 1st of November. The commission has just 68 left.

The same furious drive that pushed these off the ways has not yet touched the American shipbuilding industry, though yards are working at capacity and production is being stepped up. But some of them remember the painful sag which struck them after the World War boom. Some of the veterans eye the expansion with dread.

Process Streamlined.

However, experts say that whatever bottleneck may be slowing ship construction lies not in the yards themselves, but in the lines of supply back of the yard, chiefly in the production of engines, machinery and gears.

Considerable streamlining of the building process has been done. Experts speak of standardizing some of the equipment. The Maritime Commission has produced four types of specifications which save plan-drawing time and lop \$100,000 to \$250,000 off the cost in that way.

For shipbuilding in the past has generally been a tailoring to order process. The whims of the individual buyer were taken into consideration. The Maritime Commission specifications, though variable to meet different needs, yet provide something of a standard design.

Nothing like Hog Island has grown up yet, however, though a mild approach is being made by the Ingalls

Shipbuilding Corp. in its plant at Pascagoula, Miss. It is not a shipyard in the ordinary sense. Much of the material that goes into the Pascagoula ships comes into the plan ready-made from Birmingham steel and fabricating mills. What Pascagoula has is something of an assembly plant for ships.

New Navy Assignments Given to Five Captains

Navy orders issued yesterday gave new assignments to five captains of the line.

Capt. James T. Alexander was detached from the Bureau of Naval Operations and made commanding officer of the cruiser Wichita. He succeeds Capt. T. A. Thomson, Jr., who becomes chief of staff for the 8th Naval District.

Capt. James R. Barry was relieved of command of the cruiser Trenton and assigned to the Bureau of Naval Operations. His successor on the Trenton was not named in today's orders.

Capt. Laurence N. McNair, who was captain of the New York Navy Yard, was assigned to Washington in the Bureau of Naval Operations.

Capt. Lyell S. Pamperin was made director of Naval Reserves for the

8th Naval District, being detached from the 6th Naval District. His former post, according to today's orders, has not yet been filled.

Capt. Adolf von S. Pickhardt was detached as commanding officer of the cruiser Detroit and assigned here to the Bureau of Naval Operations. His successor also was not named.

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